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JOHN ADAMS.



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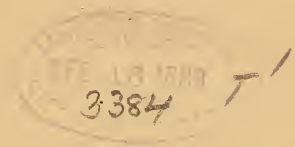
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1888.



JOHN ADAMS.

By J. Adams.

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JOHN ADAMS.

Adams, JOHN, a distinguished American statesman, the second president of the United States, was born in Braintree, about 10 miles from Boston, in the then British colony of Massachusetts Bay on the 19th of October 1735, old style. He was the eldest son of John Adams, a farmer in comfortable circumstances, and distinguished himself at Harvard College. He at first intended to become a minister, but the orthodox teachings of that day 'drove him from the profession of divinity to that of the law.' After his graduation in 1755, he was master of a school for three years at Worcester, Massachusetts, studying law meanwhile, and was admitted to the bar in 1758. For the practice of the law, he was pre-eminently qualified by these natural endowments—a sound constitution of body, a clear and sonorous voice, a ready elocution and intrepid courage, characteristics which served him in excellent stead in the stormy political career which he was destined to pass through.

In 1768 Adams removed from Braintree to Boston—then a town of about 16,000 inhabitants—where he soon acquired 'more business at the bar than any other lawyer in the province.' Soon after his settlement in Boston, the Attorney-general of the province (an officer of the crown) tendered him the post of Advocate-general in the Court of Admiralty, an offer which his

ardent sympathies with the colonists, as against the crown, constrained him to decline. Important questions touching the rights and duties of the colonies under the crown were at this time being freely debated, and Adams is credited with having struck the key-note of the revolution which separated the colonies from the mother-country, by protesting before the governor and council in 1765, against the enforcement of the Stamp Act, and against any right of parliament to tax the colonies without their consent. Although one of the most resolute and prominent of the advocates of the popular cause, he appears never to have countenanced or encouraged those violent excesses of the colonists which ended in coercive measures on the part of the crown; and when, in March 1770, some soldiers stationed in Boston fired on a mob and killed several persons, his sense of duty induced him to imperil his popularity by acting as counsel for the soldiers, who were tried for murder. In the same year the people of Boston elected him a member of the general court (the legislature); but his health failing, he withdrew from public life, and removed his residence, in 1771, to Braintree. Meanwhile he was chosen one of the five delegates from Massachusetts to the first Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia in September 1774.

Here he found a fit arena for the exercise of those great talents, both for business and debate, which ultimately raised him to the leadership of that body. He proposed and secured the election of George Washington as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army; he carried (May 1776) a resolution that the colonies should assume the duty of self-government; and on the 7th of

June seconded a motion made by Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia, that these colonies 'are and of right ought to be free and independent states.' The support on the floor of congress of this motion and of the 'Declaration of Independence' which followed, devolved mainly upon Adams, who, in the face of a sturdy opposition, acquitted himself with such ability as to lead Jefferson to style him 'The Colossus of that debate.'

The public duties which devolved upon Adams after the passing of the Declaration of Independence in congress are reported as something enormous. He was appointed president of the Board of War, and a member of upwards of ninety committees, of twenty-five of which he was chairman. He records that he was kept constantly at work from four o'clock in the morning until ten at night. After months of these incessant labours, he was granted a long vacation in the winter of 1776-7, and finally retired from congress in November of the latter year. He was, however, immediately appointed a commissioner at the court of France, from which he returned in 1779, and took part in a convention to frame a constitution for the state of Massachusetts. In November he again embarked for Europe, armed with powers from congress to negotiate a treaty of peace and commerce with the mother-country (with which the colonies were still at war); but the object of his mission becoming known at Paris, the jealousy of the French ministry was aroused, and through their influence his powers were revoked. He next visited Amsterdam, in an endeavour to interest Dutch capitalists in the cause of his country; and in January 1781 he was authorised to represent the colonies at the court of Holland. Mean-

while a new commission, consisting of Adams and four coadjutors, had been appointed by the American congress to settle the terms of peace between the United States and the mother-country, and on the 3d of September 1783 the treaty was signed. In 1785 Adams was appointed minister to England, a position which he held until he was recalled, at his own request, in 1788. While in London, he published his *Defence of the Constitution and Government of the United States* (3 vols. 1787).

In 1789 he became vice-president of the United States—General Washington being inaugurated president. Washington and Adams were re-elected in 1792; and at the close of their administration in 1796, Adams was chosen president by the Federalists—Thomas Jefferson, the republican candidate for the presidency, becoming vice-president. An administration chiefly noted for fierce dissensions among the leaders of the Federal party, especially for a bitter hostility between Adams and Alexander Hamilton, was followed by the defeat of Adams (who had become a candidate for re-election) in 1800, and the election of Jefferson and Aaron Burr, the democratic candidates, as president and vice-president. Chagrined at his defeat, and burdened with a sense of what he deemed his undeserved unpopularity among the members of his own party, Mr. Adams now retired to his home at Quincy, Massachusetts, where he passed the remainder of his life in comparative obscurity. He died July 4, 1826.

See *Works of John Adams*, edited by his grandson, C. F. Adams (10 vols. 1850-1856); *Life of John Adams*, by J. Q. Adams and C. F. Adams (2 vols. 1871); *John Adams* (American Statesmen Series), by John T. Morse, jun. (1885).

